RWANDAN MEN'S PERCEPTIONS ON LOSS OF FEELINGS FOR WIVES, MASCULINITY AND EMOTIONAL GENDERED ABUSE IN MARRIAGES IN THE CITY OF KIGALI

Dr Ndabuli T. Mugisho

Department of Entrepreneurial Leadership (BEL), African Leadership University (ALU), Kigali, Rwanda
Author's E-mail: theomug2000@gmail.com

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Abstract: The present study investigated the perceptions of men's loss of feelings toward their wives, masculinity and emotional gendered abuse in marriages in the Rwandan capital city of Kigali. Researchers conducted this qualitative study in the City of Kigali between May and July 2025. They purposely selected 30 married men, but representative for Rwandan men in all social strata, and whose ages varied between 22 and 73. Data was collected using face to face focus group discussions, with in-depth interviews. The theories of control, masculinity and reactive aggression informed the research. Masculinity posits that man behaves unemotionally to exert power and control over family members under his authority. Progressive masculinity encourages men to express their emotions to curb gendered abuse. Interviewees' narratives confirm that man's lack of feelings for his woman create emotional crises pushing the man to behave abusively. Husbands inflict emotional abuse to their wives through isolation, abusive communication and recoiling to silence. Lack of communication, unmet emotional needs, or external stressors were key prompters of emotional abuse in marriages. These results contribute to the understanding of the connectedness between men's loss of sentiments toward their wives, masculinity and emotional vehemence. The research suggests that husbands should apply constructive masculinity to renew their passions toward their wives. Such maleness, if socialised, can allow Rwandan boys to grow into men who can review and renew the definition of a real man in Kigali and around the world. Overall, scaling down emotional gendered abuse can build healthy households in Rwanda.

Key words: Rwandan men, perceptions, loss, feelings, marriages, emotional, gendered abuse, masculinity, Kigali.

INTRODUCTION

Emotional violence is part of gendered violence, and it propels because patriarchy allows men to use it to seize their power and control in their families, mostly toward the woman. Lack of feelings towards one's spouse is an aspect of masculinity that dictates many Rwandan men to resort to emotional abuse to silence their partners in married couples. The research Karakurt and Silver (2013) conducted in Singapore and Botswana confirmed, "…most men lean on masculine traits to use emotional verbal abuse". Norms of patriarchy, through fostering masculinity, remain the primary dictate for the characteristics of a typical male in every society, hindering men to display sympathy. According to Caselli et al. (2020), patriarchy discourages constructive masculinity but appreciates men with masculine traits, such as being emotionless. Societal prescriptions encourage men to display their masculinity as household heads, denoting disdain and humiliation to the wife. Men acquire such attitudes and behaviours thanks to social learning, as they socialise with related behaviours that guide real men in their society (Ma et al., 2022:1056). In the context of this research, men can display emotional abuse because patriarchy fosters it via socialisation. However, Rwanda has been empowering women, including addressing gendered abuse. Hence, not all Rwandan men appreciate emotional abuse because the government is promoting household concord by encouraging them to refrain from behaving abusively in their families.

On the other hand, masculinity, loss of feelings toward the woman and emotional abuse overlap. Sue et al. (2019:128) concede that men can abuse their women because they want to express they are men. Accordingly, emotional abuse occurs because society has told the men to hide their emotional attitudes, meaning that men's lack of sympathy for their wives prompts abuse, which males socialise with in their childhood. Learning about becoming a real man encompasses emotionlessness. Most men learn how to exert emotional abuse on women in society in order to manipulate them successfully in marriages (Carrol et al., 2010:317). Socialisation familiarises men with gendered abuse strategies to control women, which gives them the privilege of feeling more masculine. Congruent with Bashige (2023:17), patriarchal societies embolden men's emotional abuse of women to confirm their masculinity, a prerogative that inspires them to perpetuate masculinity at family and societal levels. Emotional abuse, according to Jayjay (2024:11), is the worst masculine trait a man can use to manipulate women. Most men appreciate it because its harms are internally deep and cannot easily exteriorise. In fact, by quieting women, men intend to inflict more severe moral harm, compared to the physical abuse.

A man who cannot impose his masculinity may become frustrated. Such emasculation may push him to generate another form of abuse aiming at restoring his control, power and respect. Ultimately, this perspective breeds the man's complex of inferiority whose consequences generate moral and verbal mistreatment of women. This attitude interferes with emotions because it nurtures manipulation that ultimately manifests as emotional gendered violence in the marriage. Williamson (2024) elucidates that men victimise women emotionally by making them feel the weight of socio-cultural norms of submission that preserve their low self-esteem. Men who abuse women emotionally are able to achieve their goals of control by turning aggressively against their wives. When women do battle with their men's emotional abuse they endure in families and society, most men think such women are rebelling against patriarchy, their power in the home and their masculinity. Therefore, and as Larsen (2017) puts it, men resort to physical violence in order to fully silence women, a way of forcibly restoring respect and control. The same researcher points out that men keep silence or recluse for some time for the same purpose. Equally,

Matthews (2023:20) avers that men resorting to emotional abuse in marriages appear indifferent to blames despite being aware of how their behaviours are vicious. The attitude of men with emotional abuse conveys the imposition of masculinity and masculine gender identity through women manipulation, and control to make men feel they are respected (Mugisho & Umumararungu, 2023:335). This clarifies the cultural adherence of males to gender stereotypes and the support of their power over women through their submission. Williams (2020) interprets how lack of feeling, coupled with masculinity denotes emotional violence to perpetuate male control of women by inspiring and reinforcing masculine social entitlement for power and influence over women.

The theories of control, masculinity and reactive aggression informed this study. Control feeds on patriarchy, as it endows the husband with a position to silence his wife against exposing any abuse she endures, which progressive masculinity opposes. Most men appreciate behaving unemotionlessly to exploit women emotionally at all levels of society (Mugisho & Umumararungu, 2023:11), which confirms gendered abuse. This happens when men have failed to control their emotions due to constant fear or perceived threat originating from their natural fragile nature. Goffman (1959) acknowledges that such an attitude arises from men's traits of entitlement, envy, a need for attention, arrogance, and an acute sensitivity to criticism that all create conflict in close relationships. These characteristics connect with hegemonic masculinity since they genuinely strengthen men's dominance over women in households and society. Such dominance entails man testing the safety of his masculinity. Patriarchy condones males' control through promoting masculinity and comprehension of social relations between genders (Morell, Jewkes & Lindegger, 2012). Male power remains essential to this study because it sustains emotional abuse and pertains to patriarchy, both agreeing to men's exertion of control over the lives of women by subjugating them to emotional violence. Strickland (2023) confirms that men's control of women is stigmatising although it leans on socially built preconceptions. The fact that patriarchy tolerates men to subdue women implies men's social prerogative of abusing women emotionally because society considers them superior to females. Reactive aggression, on the other hand, postulates that an aversive stimulus results in a negative emotional response, and an aversive emotional response pushes man to hurt others or develop thoughts of hurting (Gordon, 2022:13). A man whose wife has abandoned or rejected suffers the pain of anger, which might nurture his abuse, as he is scared of losing his masculinity.

In terms of methodology, the study applied a qualitative approach encompassing focus group discussions, with in-depth interviews in order to gather information. Purposively selected in Kigali, 30 married men took part in the discussions. Data was collected using interviews, with focus group discussions (FGDs). The verbatim of the interviewees seem universal, but they replicate their subjective understandings regarding lack of sentiments and emotional manipulation. For data analysis, the researchers applied thematic analysis to identify the themes that represent the generated narratives.

Emotional abuse in marriages

Marriages are an environment that is never free of gender-based violence (GBV). Most women in households face the challenge of their husbands' failure to express their feelings, a condition that often generates pervasive emotional abuse. According to Matthews (2023:21), emotional abuse occurs when one spouse habitually elevates his or her self-interest over the interests of the other. Such self-centredness in a household infers that male abusers focus on their personal comforts, conveying egotistic attitudes of

emotional abuse. Such approaches reflect the man's supremacy that may occur through various behaviours that may seem nonviolent (Larsen, 2017), yet they are coercive.

This relates to masculinity, as it elevates man higher than everyone in the family. Most men resort to emotional gendered violence because it cannot be easily recognisable. Williamson (2024) admits that such abuse is a social sin that exists in most marriages and no one can determine its presence except through blatant behaviours comprising name-calling, blame shifting, and yelling in anger. Research by Karyuki (2023) in Kenya has shown that men can lose affection without resorting to emotional abuse. Such men may have acted out inappropriately if the pain they have caused moves them, but they can eventually repent. In other words, emotional abuse in marriage involves ongoing, unrepentant patterns of coercion and control.

In fact, men perpetrate emotional abuse in marriage because they aim at controlling their victims through emotional attitudes that condemn, embarrass and humiliate their victims. Congruent with Jayjay (2024) and Gordon (2022), men appreciate emotional abuse because its effects are not easily detectable, although its patterns help to pinpoint it. This attitude reflects grandiose egotistical males who frequently view being impassive as a big plus that motivates them to take advantage of women emotionally (Mugisho & Umumararungu, 2023:11). Men of this category are not typically good managers of their emotions, making the scenario escalate into gendered abuse in many households. They have a natural fragility and a hostile tendency toward others, thus they are oblivious to doing injury, mostly to their wives, since they are always uncertain of themselves. Such occurrences illustrate the features that produce friction in close relationships, such as entitlement, envy, a need for attention, arrogance, and an extreme sensitivity to criticism (Karyuki, 2023). Men's emotional abuse blemishes the wife's self-esteem to make her live in a perpetual world of doubting her own perceptions and reality. Emotional abuse may become cyclic, and the abusers compel the victims to constantly feel morally trapped and wounded to endure the relationship any longer, but also too afraid to walk out of it (Walumona, 2018:4). Some signs indicate subtle emotional abuse in marriages, though sometimes extremely hard to detect. Discerning an abusive marriage, Bashige (2023:14) and Ma et al. (2022:1060) suggest that the woman should assess the feeling she has regarding her interaction with her husband. A woman feeling wounded, frustrated, confused, misunderstood, depressed, anxious or worthless during an interaction with her husband should understand she is in an emotionally abusive marriage. Carroll et al. (2010) assert that some women often think the situation in which they are is not appalling as they minimize the husband's behaviour. In a harmonious marriage, everyone deserves kind and respectful treatment, which can help to halt the cycle of emotional abuse.

Furthermore, sometimes a man can make confusing and contradictory statements just to mock his wife with the aim of destabilising her emotionally. Sue et al. (2019) illustrate that loss of affection plunges some men into denigrating arguments with their women, a way of coercing and hurting their emotions. According to Mwirira (2024), through emotional blackmail, an emotionless husband may use his wife's sentiments to impose remorse on her. The husband benefits from the wife's kindness and worries to humiliate her, either in private or in public. By amplifying the victim's weaknesses or emphasising them, the man is ricocheting to avoid taking responsibility for his own mistakes (Williams, 2020:7). Similarly, poor decisions, denial of an event occurrence or sometimes lies are types of emotional abuse husbands often use. In other words, a husband may punish his wife by withholding affection or giving her the silent treatment, which threatens her emotionally.

Acting masculine and superior is another form of emotional abuse husbands resort to in the marriage. Research conducted in Zimbabwe by Mwirira (2024), confirmed that a husband who is emotionally abusive often acts superior and entitled, meaning he treats his wife as a second class woman. This depicts how most men impose their masculine authority on their women by monitoring them digitally through their text messages, social media, and email. Research conducted in Malaysia (Chinsun, 2022) showed that some men use emotional abuse by accusing a woman of cheating and being jealous of outside relationships and confiscating or hiding her gadgets or other materials. The attitude denigrates the woman by considering her as a man's possession or property. Another research in Tanzania by Malago (2023) confirmed that men use jealousy and envy as a sign of love, yet they aim at hindering the woman from being in company with others. The same study found that most men might bully women into spending all their time with their husbands, leading to generating other forms of abuse, such as verbal abuse. In most cases, the woman may think her marriage is normal and loving at the start, but with the above-described types of emotional abuse, she can discover she is living in a hell of control and manipulation (Caselli et al., 2020). This may begin so slowly that the woman may not even notice her man is bullying her psychologically. Conflict is a normal part of a relationship, but Bashige (2023:22) ascertains that if it is generating belittlement, bullying, demise, disrespect or insults, then the man is crossing the line into emotional abuse.

Furthermore, emotional abuse generates short and long-term consequences that are as detrimental as physical abuse. Research conducted in Sudan by Jayjay (2024:14) revealed that instead of physical marks and bruises, the victim of emotional abuse has internal wounds that are invisible to others. The reflection here is that most men behave masculine by not venting their emotions, an attitude that harms their women. In other words, men's unemotionality inflicts the feeling of hidden suffering through self-doubt, worthlessness, and self-loathing to their women (Matthews, 2023:20). A husband blaming his wife replicates loss of feelings toward her, which subverts her emotions by making her lose her entire sense of self. Gradually, the allegations, denigrations, name-calling and verbal abuse the woman has endured erode her ego and identity, developing into a worrying condition where she sees herself unrealistically. When a man has lost feelings toward his wife, he starts behaving unemotionlessly toward her, an attitude Malago (2023:26) depicts as "morally harmful to the woman to the point it makes her lose hope and self-valuation". Once the woman notices her husband has lost feelings toward her, she starts feeling she is living in an unending humiliation and disdain from her man. The regrets of having lost to regain her husband's affection makes the woman end up objectifying herself and her self-confidence evaporates. According to Walumona (2018:8) and Mwirira (2024), the victim becomes morally fragile as she begins agreeing with her abusive husband, which causes her to become morally self-critical. This confirms that the husband has already ensnared her woman emotionally in their marriage. Research conducted in Nigeria by Maboudi (2022) shows that in an emotional abusive matrimony, the victim constantly develops the belief of living in moral prison, a condition that makes her think she has become unworthy to herself and to anyone else. Similarly, Miura and Fujiwara (2017) contend that emotional abuse is life destructive in all its meanings because it sends the victim into seclusion. Individual and social isolation makes the victim lose all physical and virtual acquaintances. Human beings are natural gregarine social beings who cannot survive once cut off from the general society (Crosier, 2017). This condition implies that a woman with an abusive husband forced to quit her friends suffers emotionally. This portrays how emotionally abused people often worry about how society considers them and if those around them truly like them.

Emotional abuse in marriage is toxic and can prompt some health anomalies because masculinity encourages men to behave unemotionally. When a man has no emotions toward others, he makes them suffer emotionally as it makes him feel he is a true man. Research conducted in Mali (Hawau, 2023) indicates that most emotionally abused people suffer mental health, including anxiety, depression, and sometimes an eating disorder. Equally, women in emotionally abusive marriages may suffer physically to the point they can develop stomach ulcers, heart palpitations, and insomnia (Chen et al., 2017). The majority of these women present these behaviours due to cyclic emotional disdain the husbands have imposed on them, convincing them that no other person can appreciate their behaviour or thoughts (Omotoso& Akanbi, 2018). Persistent self-hatred is poisonous for many women living in emotionally abusive marriages because the situation may culminate into suicide.

Eventually, many studies (Adikwu et al., 2021; Islam, Johan & Hossain, 2018; Karyuki, 2023; Peatee, 2018) have explored how men perpetrate gender-based violence to women but little has explored its horrible type of emotional abuse as the outcome of masculinity and men loss of feelings in marriages. Not exploring this form of GBV in marriages confirms how hegemonic patriarchy condones men's abuse to women because that is another way of confirming masculinity, yet severely harmful to women. Masculinity wants men to control and have power over women and other men in family and society. Despite the pressure from different social strata to scale down gendered abuse to women, the cruelty has persisted in the form of emotional abuse (Gordon, 2022:14). Understanding masculinity through ways men decide to lose feelings toward their wives is paramount exploring. The documentation sounds relevant because these factors are key in propelling emotional gendered abuse in households.

Accordingly, the research seeks to respond to the questions below, as they inform it.

1. In which way do you think men's loss of feelings toward their wives can prompt emotional abuse in marriage?
2. How can you describe the connection between a husband's loss of feelings toward his wife, masculinity and emotional abuse in marriage?
3. As a married man, what can you suggest to other men to scale down emotional abuse in marriages?

The subsequent section makes a thorough analysis of the research outcomes via themes deriving from the verbatim based on the three questions above.

DATA ANALYSIS

The sections below discuss the key findings regarding Rwandan men's loss of feelings toward their women, emotional abuse and masculinity in marriages in Kigali. Through different themes, the interviewees explained how patriarchal norms of maleness encourage them not to express openly their feelings toward their women, although this leads to emotional abuse.

Woman's disdain of her man and personal negligence of herself

Most interviewees in this research shared how some men feel frustrated when their women lack appreciating them or when they are nonchalant. In Udobang (2018), most men drop their affection and feelings for their women when the latter disdain them, because it endangers their maleness. Besides, the

annoyance husbands get because their spouses have disdained them often leads to loss of feelings. The condition of losing affection makes most Rwandan men resort to emotional domestic abuse. Similarly, interviewee KGL/24/2024 shares that

> *If my family is balanced, I will want to feel like my significant other appreciates me. See for example, if your partner cannot acknowledge your efforts or makes you feel taken for granted, you end up developing the feeling of an undervalued man. Now you as a man, when your woman is causing you a headache, you will not feel attached to her anymore*.

According to this interviewee, one expectation in a relationship is to feel appreciated, respected and supported. Most Rwandan men have such a prospect that they interpret as sensibly valid, because they want to feel it in their home in any condition where their wives should back them. To Hawau (2023), when the wife ignores her husband's desires and needs, it scorns him, making him feel emasculated. Rwandan men sense their women are disrespecting them if they do not allow them to exert their masculinity. This condition motivates many men to withdraw their friendliness from their women, which often hurts the woman morally. Larsen (2017) argues that the men who feel their wives do not appreciate them coil to their circles and decide to cut off their affection from such women. Such masculine attitude is morally harmful to the woman and it tears apart her heart.

On the other hand, other interviewees shared how a man can retract his affection in case the woman neglects herself. According to Ukwayi et al. (2018:80), self-neglect is a behavioural condition in which an individual neglects to attend to their basic needs, willingly or not. The condition encompasses personal hygiene, appropriate clothing, feeding, or tending appropriately to any medical condition they have. Similarly, interviewee KGL/7/2024 confided

> *Some women behave strangely when it comes to how they care about themselves. You may think they created that. They dress carelessly and even speak the same way. Others are so careless that you think they were at school for that. Do you think in either way, the man of such a woman who deeply neglects herself can feel her or develop affection for her? Not at all. When she notices it, she can become angry. I do not care because a woman who cannot care about herself will never care about you and the children. Such negligence can bring her diseases on the body or in the body and that can affect her man too. Yes, and you are right. No one can desire to sleep with a woman smelling like a wet billy goat.*

The verbatim of this interviewee illustrates how a woman's personal inattention repels a man's attention to her, which affects the woman morally and physically. Accordingly, Omotoso and Akanbi (2018) admit self-negligence can be intentional or non-intentional. Active self-negligence becomes active when the person makes a conscious choice to engage in neglecting themselves, which most men hate. Passive self-negligence, however, is unintentional in the sense that the person becomes careless unintentionally, and some men can tolerate this condition. This condition often occurs when the person undergoes health-related conditions that contribute to their risk of developing self-neglect (Ndem, Angioha & Dike, 2020:89). Culturally, many men in Kigali have dissimilar opinions regarding tolerable living standards, making "individual neglect a grave and intricate issue that necessitates clinical, ethical and societal decisions in its management and treatment" (Jong, Iji & Angioha, 2019:44).

Many Rwandans in Kigali detest women with poor personal health, hygiene and living conditions. Self-negligence affects some women in this region because of its complexity, making anyone struggling to maintain a socially and culturally accepted standard of self-care. It can have severe consequences

because it connects with society and community, meaning masculinity is part of it. A woman neglecting herself disdains hegemonic masculinity in her community. To Chen et al. (2017), poor physical and moral hygiene and even spirituality is devastating for the woman, and it may lead to her social isolation. In other words, men will turn their eyes off her, which may cause her to suffer morally. Interviewee KGL/13/2024 added, *"I have no eyes to look twice at a careless woman. A woman must be clean on and in her body, and in her spirit. Neglecting her body means I will neglect her too. I know it hurts her but I will be insensitive to her."* This interviewee openly shows that men will always abandon a careless woman, which Ma et al. (2022:1062) confirm becomes like a syndrome of extreme self-negligence. Similarly, interviewee KGL/22/2024 shared how *"a careless woman does not make her husband feel he is a real man, pushing him to seek the one who values him."* In other words, a Rwandan man in Kigali might have a girlfriend because he feels his woman's behaviour has emasculated him. This often might occur in case the woman's personal negligence poisons the man's reputation and dignity in his area. Other men would abuse morally, physically or spiritually their self-careless women in order to cover the social shame they caused them. Besides, many women have become single mothers in Kigali because of their bodily, ethical and even psychic carelessness.

Unending conjugal clashes

Many more interviewees admitted that men could not have feelings for their women in case the latter were the cause of their repeated household contentions. Marital conflict, according to Hawau (2023), refers to the tension, disagreements, and conflicts that arise between spouses within a marriage. These conflicts can stem from various sources and may involve differing opinions, unmet expectations, and emotional struggles. Interviewee KGL/11/2024 confided that

> *You and I are married, aren't we? We have expectations as men in our homes but we do not meet them all the time because we meet different reasons. Misunderstanding can come out because of miscommunication. See for instance, I want my son to behave like a man, but the wife comes in to say all children are the same. I may also want to save money for family plans, but the wife says she needs it for artificial nails and wigs. You know, researcher, you can also have a woman who you plan to go somewhere with but when time comes, she is not ready yet. Will you fight her, postpone the attendance or accept to come late? And communication over sexual plans have always caused domestic encounters. As the woman does not respect all these and many more, it can make many feel uncomfortable with his woman, leading to retracting one's feelings toward her.*

The ideas of most interviewees paralleled those of this interviewee. Most family conflicts evolve around communication. Gordon (2022:13) shares that there has always been contentions in a household when partners cannot communicate compatibly. Accordingly, most Rwandan men want to make sure their women are following their instructions for the family to live peacefully. Malago (2023) points out that when a woman fails to abide by her man's injunction, the man feels emasculated. This condition has caused many Rwandan men to sanction their women by cutting their feelings off their women, leading to emotional abuse. Depriving a woman of affection, feeling and sympathy because of miscommunication is always abusive, which makes the woman suffer emotionally. Mwirira (2024) and Strickland (2023) add that marital conflict might erupt around the couple's communication regarding the management of family finances, children education as well as sexual life planning. When the couple fails to discuss successfully about these factors, they ultimately find themselves into stiff skirmishes at family level. Time management is another point that life partners must discuss harmoniously to avoid family chaos. In fact, conflicts are unavoidable among Rwandan families because they are not harmful themselves if they are managed positively. Gordon (2022:9) pointed out that what matters more in such cases is the way the man

and the woman handle their domestic misunderstandings. In other words, constructive conflict management and open communication between the couple are key for maintaining a healthy relationship at the family level.

Man's incomparability with other men

Most interviewees admitted that every man is naturally unique and cannot parallel another one. In fact, no man could appreciate any woman comparing her husband to another man. Many Rwandan men have abused their women emotionally for such comparison. Miura and Fujiwara (2017) elucidate how a woman comparing her husband to other men she has lived with or sees around, regarding achievement in any way can make the husband lose feeling and affection toward her woman. Being a family protector and supporter, no man would tolerate a woman relating him to other males around. Interviewee KGL/26/2024 shared,

> *Brother, I am a man, I understand who I am, and you do the same. I always perceive myself as valuable to my wife and my children for being their breadwinner. I am also a man because I support my family financially. A woman who can look down on the role of her man but appreciates a neighbour's husband is rejecting her man's frugality.*

The above respondent admits that man always views himself as valuable for his commitment for feeding and shielding his family. Patriarchy encourages most Rwandan men to value themselves as head protectors of their families. To Enukoha and Angioha (2017:3), being a breadwinner and a financial supporter of his household, all the members of the family respect the man. However, patriarchy privileges more men than women, meaning that women must remain compliant to their men. Sanz-Barbero et al. (2019) approve that no man can feel motivated with a woman who derides the opportunities society gives to men pertaining to masculinity. Ignoring her husband's worth and efforts is to spit on his masculinity. Most men can decide to disregard such a woman because they agree she has betrayed the masculine hegemony. The implication of such disdain toward the husband implies her disregarding every man, a sacrilege to man's superiority. Chen et al. (2017) opine that a woman who nurtures such a dream has hollow thoughts that humiliates men's superiority. Husband and wife in a harmonious marriage should understand each other, and failing so would lead to domestic contention, including emotional abuse. The couple's mutual discussion exhorts men to promote constructive masculinity, which urges men to act as if everyone's voice is equally valuable and to consider others' opinions with goodwill and respect. Interviewee KGL/14/2024 confided, *"We can willingly try that way, but it is hard. To behave opposite of social masculinity may make the woman climb on your shoulder and start playing with your beard."* This interviewee shares what most Rwandan men believe in. In fact, patriarchal men think that applying positive communication is hard or even impossible to do because they believe it can make them lose their societal power. Congruent with Heise et al. (2019), treating others with consideration can make the spouse feel valued, and believe that their partner knows them well enough to know what will hurt their feelings. Unending domestic disputes can sometimes break communication between the couple.

Absence of open communication

Most interviewees were married men selected in the Rwandan's capital city, Kigali, and shared that communication can cause positive or negative feelings in a marriage. Udobang (2018) describes communication as the act of transferring information from one place, person or group to another. Similarly, dialogue is everything in a marriage mostly, because it can destroy or build the emotional life of a couple. Conversation also plays a pivotal role to the success of sexual intimacy as it strengthens the couples' emotional life. Positive communication in marriage can eliminate emotional abuse, inferring a

healthy sex life. In fact, its absence turns into emotional frustration because it can easily shatter the couple's freedom (Adikwu et al., 2021). Passionate foiling has hindered many Rwandan men not to be overt in conversation regarding their sexual intimacy. Open dialogue can motivate the couple in marriage to talk about what each spouse needs from the other, and how they want it. In line with Peatee (2018), open discussion in a marriage is an expression of what can turn a partner on and what a spouse wants from the other for reciprocal delight. In a conjugal context, positive communication nurtures the couple's feelings, whereas the negative one kills and buries them. Accordingly, interviewee KGL/12/2024 shared:

> *In our marriage, we as men do not tolerate our women to speak to us the way they like. We need that discussion where a man feels he is respected, he remains the chief commander and his words are observed. On the contrary, he feels not a man and he must restore it. I mean every man wants positive communication to remain hooked to his wife; if not, his feelings can evaporate. This condition often creates contentment in families. When my emotional state dies, it will shake my wife as well.*

By perusing the verbatim of this interviewee, we understand that a good household builds on positive communication, and lack of it is vicious for the marriage. When a man is not an effective conversant with his woman, his emotions will disappear. Once they disappear, it will affect the woman and all culminate into emotional abuse. Most Rwandan men want a careful listening woman, which adds on the meaning of masculinity. One aspect of masculinity stipulates, according to Mugisho and Ibrahim (2024:15), that when a true man coughs, even flies fly to create calmness around. Masculinity encourages men to feel manly even when they are speaking. Once a man feels his woman does not take care of his speech, it may create misunderstanding. The context then leads to the dropping of his feelings toward the woman and reduces his attention to her. Therefore, emotional abuse might follow in most cases. When the man has lost feelings toward his wife, he does not seek out any feedback from her any more regarding the way she captured the message and perhaps attempt corrections (Jong, Iji & Angioha, 2019:38). Masculine arrogance creates emotional abuse toward the woman as it becomes confusing. In other words, the man will conclude his family members do not listen to him, which angers him as his emotions are disturbed. Similarly, the wife will also react furiously as she feels she is not valued. In fact, the man must be strategic to keep his emotions alive by ensuring the effectiveness of his message to his woman to protect his emotional health. Failing to share his feelings and concerns, according to Crozier (2017), can openly contribute a lot to the wife to appreciate him and so his emotions can remain connected to her.

Interviewees shared how misunderstanding can occur at any stage of the communication process between a husband and his wife. According to Islam, Jahan and Hossain (2018), men's effective communication should scale down toxic masculinity and potential misunderstanding because these can trigger emotional disruption. Rwanda is a society with a patriarcho-hegemonic structure that condones men's masculine behaviours despite the negative consequences they generate toward women. Nhi, Hanha and Gammeltfoft (2018) assert that society may condone some masculine traits in order to promote that form of masculinity that harms women morally. Accordingly, interviewee KGL/5/2024 shared

> *...and also know that a true man never cares about moral harm but about being man. A good woman must express herself well toward her man. We often seem without empathy in this context as we sound a bit selfish. But we must live as societal men who hardly care*

> *about women's emotions. Women are morally attached to their men, the reason why men often break their wives' morality.*

The idea behind this respondent's narrative is that many Rwandans often lose feelings toward their wives because the latter could not communicate openly. Enukoha and Angioha (2017:7) share how communication between married people is the glue between them by stabilising the emotive life between men and women in their household. However, a woman's unclear communication can encourage the husband to impair his wife's moral comportment, which often leads to abuse and violence. Since women cling affectionately to their men, they then should be careful on how they communicate with their husbands. This is because most Rwandan men will blame their wives for miscommunication once they feel they have no more affection in them. Such a lie seeks to drown the woman into being the main cause of his emotional violence. Congruent with Ndem, Angioha and Dike (2020:88), positive communication could convey true maleness for partners to cement their feelings by maintaining an overt interchange that prioritises each other's needs in a marriage. Such a condition encourages husbands and wives to work together to navigate challenges by sustaining healthy emotions for positive connection. On the other hand, other interviewees shared that sometimes women's irregularity in their imperfect communication may anger their husbands and push them to attack the wife's emotional life for revenge. Jong, Iji and Angioha (2019:39) elucidate how rough patches in household communicative life may disturb the emotions of a partner. This has pushed interviewee KGL/03/2024 to confide that

> *Sometimes, we live hard times in our marriage because of one of us; maybe the man or the woman. You know, we men always want to live like societal men. It will not be good if your woman calls you names, raises her voice against you as a man. It cannot work that way because as a man, you may lose feelings for her, and so decide to harm her in her inner morality.*

In fact, the above interviewee means that many husbands dislike their women to give them names. In line with Udobang (2018), men never support women giving them names; otherwise, they feel emasculated. Endangering a man's masculinity may lead to intimidating his wife's moral life. In other terms, men are always ready to change small things into emotional abuse in order to protect their masculinity.

Changes in men's priorities and expectations

Most interviewees shared how Rwandan men could lose feelings toward their wives, leading to abusing them emotionally. In line with Sanz-Barbero et al. (2019), a husband may misplace attention to his woman when he focuses on his masculinity and personal growth as part of his life's priorities. Rwandan married men have essential priorities and expectations, including beliefs regarding their sexual life in households. Whatever prospect and priority these men may have, it should be in tandem with their masculinity. Peatee (2018) denounces man's abuse to women by neglecting marriage requirements that blend the physical, emotional, cultural, psychological, spiritual and mental together for a great sexual experience. One of marriages' predictable precedence is flexibility in communication and in any other behaviour. Rwandan married men need this expectation because it encourages a partner to break emotional exploitation. Congruent with Omotoso and Akanbi (2018), men need suppleness to address behavioural and communicative rigidity because the latter kills passion by driving emotion away. In a marriage, flexibility is a requirement toward each other, a way of being each other's student. Interviewee KGL/20/2024 shared

> *…and in a good marriage, maleness wants the wife to be under the [domination of] man. Man and woman can also be one thing, as they understand each other to stabilize their emotions. The expectation is that the man can also respect his woman and value her emotions. And the woman must not harm her man's emotion too, by using her sex. A wife must learn from the husband, and vice versa. Communication also means being malleable in a marriage; the husband accepts to learn from his wife, and the wife to be a learner for some time only. This is important in daily dialogue in marriage and mostly during sexual leisure.*

This interviewee details how masculinity expects Rwandan men in matrimony to promote good communication by allowing the man to live his masculinity while focusing on his expectations and priorities. The prospect of sexual performance in marriages remains part of marital communication, and each partner may become both a teacher and a learner at the same time. Enukoha and Angioha (2017:5) assert that conjugal dialogue looks at all aspects that can promote emotional balance, such as honeymoon knowledge. Men in Rwanda must seek communication about sexual language and each partner must abide by it. Being ready for change requires that both spouses agree on ways of having a good time together (Crozier, 2017). Growth and expectation require men's flexibility, and these have been very instrumental for men's lack of feeling toward their women, leading to emotional neglect. Interviewee KGL/11/2024 admits that,

> *We men in Kigali can drop sentiments, and that is normal. For us, it means that no woman can attract a man morally when he is concentrating on his life. By life I understand "man has life priorities he must fulfil to be a man." You know, man always wants to grow in all senses, become tall and with biceps, to grow economically and get a good job and many others. With these in mind, you cannot feel a woman. The woman will feel morally hurt because she thinks she is abandoned.*

Most interviewees shared the above interviewee's attitude by indicating how they have expectations as married men in households, but regarding emotionlessness toward women. Accordingly, most men in Kigali will lose feelings towards their women as an expression of masculinity. Growing emotionless is a form of abuse most men impose on women to confirm they have power and control over them. Chen et al. (2017) concede that most men feel losing their masculinity once they cannot have full control over their women. This sounds threatening for most men and makes them lose interest in their women. Such demotivation often pushes many men in Kigali to opt for emotional manipulation to restore controlling power over their women. In other words, emotional threat sounds like a man's effective tool to reiterate their masculine control in the marriage (Heise et al., 2019). This expects most men to manipulate women because the latter do not assert agency or control over men or other women. The probability is that, culturally speaking, most Rwandan men will assert their masculinity to keep control over women. Conversely, a male abuser cannot make a mistake about it, the instant a woman attempts to reclaim her autonomy. In fact, low self-esteem sounds like a cause that might push some Rwandan men in Kigali to lose feelings for their women, and so decide to remain eternal emotional abusers. Interviewee KGL/01/2024 contends,

> *You know this thing of being a man is intangible for all of us men. It sometimes impetuses us men to build strong boundaries around ourselves. Once we have done so, we do not want our women to break the barriers because it can distress us. Once we are anxious, the distress also affects our women. This sounds an absurd and quick move that ghosts*

> *our women and us men as well. This shakes our emotions as it gradually starts pushing us to disdain our women. It is here that arguments and blames start to culminate progressively into abuse. When you think your wife has offended you because you have disturbed her emotions, then you are devaluing yourself.*

This informant echoes the ideas of many other interviewees and that of many Rwandan men that expect to protect their maleness. Men who have this expectation feel comfortable even if it may hurt their women. The context discomforts women fast because it makes them feel disdained, which Miura and Fujiwara (2017) consider as prompter of arguments and blames. When a Rwandan man feels low self-esteem and low self-respected, it pushes him to victimise his woman. Nurturing this belief, according to Adikwu et al. (2021), infers families' failure to socialise their children with a strong sense of personal and social restrictions. Men in Kigali believe children's socialisation can help them to set boundaries for their safety as they mature. However, socialising children in this context must occur concomitantly in order to make them grow into *"mature men who can shoulder accountability for their abuses toward younger people, women and anyone else at family and societal levels"* (Ukwayi et al., 2018:80).

Conclusion and suggestions

This study has addressed the perceptions of men regarding loss of emotion toward their spouses, masculinity and emotional gendered manipulation in marriages in the Rwandan's capital city of Kigali. Research detailed how these dynamics nurture man's selfishness over his woman's comforts to destabilise her emotions. A male partner may abuse his wife emotionally by aiming on his masculine demands although they suffocate his wife.

According to many respondents' accounts, some men become irritated when their wives fail to give them more attention. In reality, when a woman treats her man with contempt, he gives up his feelings for her since the attitude jeopardizes his masculinity. Furthermore, the frustration that a husband experiences from his woman's dislike for him frequently results in emotional detachment. A woman's morality and physical health may suffer as a result of a man being turned off by her own inattention. In addition, if a wife is the cause of her man's frequent arguments at home, he can stop loving her. Marital argument infers to the strain, arguments, and confrontations that develop between partners in a marriage.

These disputes may generate consequences, including disagreements, unfulfilled expectations, and emotional difficulties. Most men are inherently different from one another and cannot be compared. Men never tolerate who compares them with other men, which judgements have caused many Rwandan men to emotionally mistreat their wives. On the other hand, as it restricts the couple's freedom, a lack of communication in a marriage implies an unhealthy sexual life and causes emotional resentment. Many husbands are hindered by passionate foiling when they want to avoid being overt about their sexual intimacy. Having an honest conversation might encourage a married couple to discuss what each other needs and wants from the other.

The findings of this research indicated that when a husband prioritizes his own development and masculinity over his relationship with his wife, he may lose interest in her. It is crucial to set goals and expectations for married individuals, especially a man's expectations for the kind of sex he wants. Any goals and objectives a husband may have should be consistent with his masculinity. According to other findings, a lot of husbands are secure in defending their masculinity, even if it can harm their relationships

with women. Women become uncomfortable with this quickly because it makes them feel devalued. A husband will act aggressively toward his wife when he feels she disrespects him and makes him feel low in self-worth. Fostering this notion implies that parents did not instill in their children a strong sense of social and personal boundaries. Men from Rwanda think that when youngsters socialize, it helps them develop limits that will keep them safe as they grow older. However, for youngsters to grow into mature adults who can comprehend they can be held accountable for their abuses toward children, women, and anyone else at the family and societal levels, socialization of the children in this context must happen concurrently.

Interviewees confided that tackling the problem of men mistreating their spouses in marriages as a result of their growing disgust for them is still a crucial first step in eradicating the scourge. They recommended that men should avoid emotional abuse because it takes time for the victim to recover from it. Certainly, men's perceptions of women can be altered thanks to progressive masculinity. This lengthy process should begin in households where the father and mother teach their children to respect women in all social classes. When such children become adults, they can socialise with men who respect and value women no matter where they will be.

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